



NEWS RELEASE

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North Dakota To Begin Vaccination of Smallpox Response Teams

BISMARCK, N.D. – On Monday, Feb. 24, 2003, public health officials in North Dakota will begin the process of vaccinating volunteer health care workers and public health personnel against smallpox, according to State Health Officer Terry Dwelle, M.D., of the North Dakota Department of Health.

North Dakota and other states are conducting the vaccination effort at the request of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as part of a nationwide effort to prepare for a possible terrorist attack involving the smallpox virus.

“Protecting the public is our highest priority,” Dwelle said. “Although the probability of an intentional release of smallpox is low, the consequences are so great that the state and the nation must be prepared. These steps will help ensure that this deadly disease cannot be used effectively as an agent of bioterrorism.”

Vaccinations will begin Monday when the state health officer and several public and private health care workers will be vaccinated. Following that, clinics will begin across the state at which volunteer health professionals will receive the vaccine. Officials expect the process of vaccinating the volunteers to take 30 to 45 days.

To maintain security – and to protect the privacy of the volunteers who are being vaccinated – state health officials will not disclose the dates or locations of the clinics.

“This is a voluntary effort – both for the hospitals involved and the individuals who are being vaccinated,” Dwelle said. “The goal is to vaccinate a core group of people so they can respond quickly if we ever have to deal with an actual smallpox attack.”

At this time, only key smallpox response teams are being vaccinated. In the absence of a smallpox case, the federal government is not recommending that members of the general public be vaccinated. Vaccine given within four days of exposure to smallpox can prevent the disease or

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lessen the symptoms. Should a clear threat or an actual outbreak occur anywhere, the United States has enough smallpox vaccine to vaccinate everyone in America.

“Public and private health care professionals across the state are stepping forward to selflessly serve others should the unthinkable situation of a smallpox case become a reality,” Dwelle said. “I am extremely proud of those who have volunteered to serve on the state’s smallpox response teams.”

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Please note: Fact sheets and other information about smallpox can be found on the following websites:

- North Dakota Department of Health – www.health.state.nd.us
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/smallpox/reference/resource-kit.asp
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – www.hhs.gov/smallpox

People who have questions or concerns about smallpox can call the following CDC phone numbers: 1.888.246.2675 (English); 1.888.246.2857 (Spanish); and 1.888.874.2646 (hearing impaired).

A media event will be held Monday, Feb. 24, 2003, at which you will be able to get video or still images of Dr. Dwelle and other health care professionals who have volunteered to be vaccinated on-camera. Location and time will be announced later.